

## The Asset, The Winter Soldier, Bucky

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## The Asset, The Winter Soldier, Bucky

by [EveryDayBella](#)

### Summary

The Soldier keeps them safe, always on the move. The Asset is a mess of anger and misdirection. Then there's poor, lost Bucky, trying to put his memories back together. Three men living in the same body. There's only so long that can last, especially when he's being hunted.

### Notes

AN: This ship. I swear it's goal in life is to destroy me. This fic just came out of nowhere and demanded to be written. Muchos love to Angelycdevil for bossing her way into my doc, Packy, DSS\_12, and Courtney for always flailing over teasers, and MyHeroin for betaing and being generally awesome. I love you guys so damn much!

song for the chapter, The Spectator - The Bravery

# His Eyes Like Two Cats Scratching in His Head

## Chapter 1

### His Eyes Like Two Cats Scratching in His Head

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Bucky, The Winter Soldier, the Asset, whoever he really is, finds himself drawn to New York City. He stays hidden-he's good at that-and chases half remembered ghosts and memories he isn't sure are memories. The only thing he knows for certain is where he should be.

New York City. He repeats the words to himself a few times, changing the cadence and accenting different parts. He's not quite sure what he's looking for, until he finds it. The way the thick accent feels on his tongue sparks a half formed memory. A frail, sickly boy, taking a punch because he stood up to some bullies who were making fun of another child's accent.

The Soldier scoffs. To him, its a waste. Why take a punch, just to protect a weaker person? There's nothing to gain there.

*Steve.* The part of him that's still Bucky reminds him. *His name is Steve.*

He connects that face to the one from the bridge and the one he pulled out of the water. They're nothing alike. The boy was too thin, like he would snap in the first strong gust of wind. The man had been able to fight him. He's not sure how the two are connected. Are they connected? Or is this memory not a memory at all? It could just be another Hydra lie. He has no way of knowing and this makes him angry, which in turn brings out the Asset.

The Asset, much like the Soldier, lives for the mission and nothing is more important. Get the mission done. Target acquired. Target neutralized. Do everything right, and the pain is less. The pain is never really gone, but it could be less and Bucky reached for every straw he could get.

The Asset is without a mission for the first time in his life and he's not happy. He feeds off the Soldier's anger and Bucky's frustration and will occasionally take control. He goes after Hydra agents unaware that The Soldier and Bucky send him after them. They know they can't control the Asset, but they can keep him from hurting innocents.

New York isn't anything like Bucky remembers it. It scares him. Nothing looks right. Part of it looks like a war went through it. The buildings seem to be taller, the cars faster, and how are there are there more people?

Bucky manages to force the Asset and the Soldier to Brooklyn. He doesn't remember much, but he remembers Brooklyn. He remembers alleys where he would have to rescue Steve. He remembers jazz dance halls and army recruiting stations. He's looking for something, something he can't put his fingers on. Hydra turned his brains to scrambled eggs, and it hurts almost as trying to unscramble them as it hurt scrambling them.

The Soldier keeps them safe, always on the move, never still enough that Hydra or S.H.I.E.L.D. can find them. The Asset is a mess of anger and misdirection. Then there's poor, lost Bucky. Trying to put his memories back together. Trying to find that elusive thing right on the edge of his mind that he can't name, he just knows he needs it.

Three men living in the same body. There's only so long that can last.

In Brooklyn, at least they're able to find some sense of stability. Even better, the longer they're there, the more Bucky is able to gain some control. He's timid and uneasy at first, but it feels good. The memories are hazy and he still has no idea what he's looking for, but he's looking and that's good. That's right.

The Asset even quiets. Bucky can still feel him, all that pent up rage is locked up and he knows it won't stay that way for long. He has a small window of time.

The first thing Bucky does is cut his hair. The Soldier tries to fight him on it, but Bucky fights back. He hates that fringe of hair. It's annoying, always falling in his eyes and he knows, he KNOWS, that it was never this long then. He decides to cut it short and he does it. He knows it looks awful, but he's not worried about that. No one sees him anyway. What is important is that he got to choose. He got to control for the first time in seventy years. He gets to do what he wants.

Nights are the worst. None of them like sleeping. The Asset and The Soldier don't like how defenseless it makes them. Bucky doesn't like the nightmares. Sometimes they'll spark new memories, but these memories hurt. Kills, pain, humiliations, loss, terror, panic. Every night it's the same thing, and he starts trying to sleep less to fight it.

He learns pretty quickly that fighting sleep just makes him weak and gives the other two more ammo. It's hell all over again and Bucky hates it. He learns to put up with the nightmares, because that's how he keeps control, but they never go away. He wakes up every night, behind whatever dumpster he's managed to hide behind, screaming and soaked in sweat. He doesn't go back to sleep and shakes for the rest of the night, like when he was a kid and scared of the thunder. But it's okay, because he can keep control that way and that's all that matters.

It's the Asset that figures out they have a tail. It's terrifying. It could be any one. A Hydra agent there to take their weapon back, a S.H.I.E.L.D agent to arrest him, and any number of third parties. The Soldier is calculating possibilities, debating where to go now, what needs to happen next. The Asset wants to unleash all that pent up anger. He finally has a target. The Soldier has a mission.

Then there's Bucky. Bucky who is tired of fighting. Bucky who thinks he might never be warm again. Bucky who is still searching, for what he doesn't know. Bucky who wants to be complete. Bucky wants to stop running. He wants to escape and find a deeper foxhole if he has to.

Bucky is still too weak to fight the other two. He can at least keep the Asset under control, so the Soldier can do what he does best. Stay one step ahead. Start a goose chase. Never visit the same place twice. Always keep an eye out for the tail, for anything that will tell them who is following them, and who they're working for.

This goes on for days, weeks? Bucky isn't very good at keeping track of time. He still doesn't think very clearly. He thinks he blacks out sometimes. That doesn't help and with the tail, The Soldier controls more. He doesn't care about time, just about what it takes to shake the tail. The Asset only cares about the anger.

Finally, he catches a glimpse of the tail. It's a woman, thin and lithe with fiery red hair. He recognizes her. She was with the man on the bridge. This makes Bucky wake up again. He knew the man on the bridge. His name was Steve, and he was important. He's not sure why yet, but he was.

The Soldier and The Asset want to attack, but Bucky stops them. He's something he can't remember feeling in a long time, he's curious. Maybe she knows how to get to Steve.

The Soldier has a new mission. Follow the tail. They lead the woman on, getting just close enough to tease and, then running away. Cat and mouse.

It takes a while, of that Bucky's sure, but finally two more join her on an op. There's the dark one with wings—he must have found a new pair—and Steve. He's the clear leader. He's the one who tells the others not to use deadly force. That gives Bucky a odd, warm glow. It makes the other two nervous. Why did they want to capture him? What were they going to do to him?

He has no intentions of being taken alive.

Things go from bad to worse for Bucky. This is serious. This is life and death, and there's a part of him that doesn't want to run anymore, but with adrenaline pumping through his riddled system, he wasn't in control. The Soldier is for now, but the Asset is right under the surface, and it wouldn't take much for him to blow. All that rage and three perfectly good targets. Targets that have shattered the fragile order in his life.

There is nothing that Bucky could do. He tries to take control. He tries to tell the other two not to hurt them. Until this day, he hasn't realized how much of a prisoner he is in his own body. He breaks the woman's elbow with a twist of his metal arm, and the Asset rejoices. He grounds the man with the wings, likely a concussion, medical attention would be needed.

Then there is the real target. They call him Captain America. The Asset cackles, the Soldier prepares, and Bucky screams. Not Steve. They need Steve. He doesn't know why, but they need Steve. Steve is the key. Steve can help. Don't hurt Steve.

Bucky fights like hell. That's all he knows to do, but he doesn't have an edge. Fortunately, he and Steve are pretty evenly matched. That also means there's only one way for this to end. The Asset is firmly in control and he doesn't care about surviving. He just cares about the mission and Steve is the mission.

Steve talks during the whole fight. He begs Bucky to remember, he barely fights back. It drives the Asset crazy. He just wants a fight that Steve won't give him. Bucky wants nothing more than to answer, he wants to stop fighting, he wants to stop running. He just wants to stop.

The inevitable comes. The Asset manages to pin Steve down, and is just seconds away from finishing the job. Bucky can't let that happen and just manages to wrench control away from The Asset before the blow comes down.

He stumbles backwards, falling to his knees as a whole new battle breaks out in his head. He screams, just to let the let sound out, just to release the pressure. The fingernails on his real hand brake through skin. The last time he remembers pain this bad was the last time they scrambled his brain.

"Bucky!" He looks up to find Steve approaching. His wide blue eyes may have been worried, but the The Asset and The Soldier only see a threat, and Bucky can't hold on.

"Stop. Stop. Stop." He groans. Trying to fight back, barely able to breath, barely able to think, barely holding on. Steve listens at least and stops a few feet from him. For some reason this makes Bucky want to laugh. *When had that punk ever listened?* Where had that come from?

"Go. You've got to go." Bucky moans, feeling like his head is about to split in half. He can see the determination set into the other man's face and knows he's not listening. He takes a step forward and Bucky cringes back. He can't lose control and he's hanging on by a thread. "GO!"

"I'm not leaving, Bucky." Bucky does something he hasn't done in seventy years. He rolls his eyes. It hurts, making the pounding in his head even worse, but he likes it.

"You have to go." One breath for each word. It's the only way to get anything out through gritted teeth. "I can't hold them. Go!"

Steve's face crumples in despair and confusion. "Can't hold who?"

Bucky screams, a horrible sound that melts into a sob. Everything hurts like hell. He doesn't want to hurt anyone, but he's not sure he can control it. There is a part of him that just wants to die. He wants it to be over, but he can't verbalize any of it. He was trained to shut up. When he spoke up the pain got worse. He remembered that much. He was muzzled like a dog and there was no talking. Even though he wants to, he can't. He takes a deep breath. Then another. "Steve, please."

Bucky has his head buried in his arms, curled into a ball like a pathetic dog. He doesn't think Steve is going to listen to him, and he just doesn't care anymore. He just wants to stop fighting.

"I'll be back, Buck." Steve's voice is warm, like a summer wind, and breathes life through his tired body. "Just hang on."

Bucky hears his footsteps leave in the direction of his fallen comrades. The Asset is screaming for blood. A surprise attack. He'd never see it coming. It would be over quick. Bucky stamps down on the Asset, refusing to listen, even though it hurts like hell. He manages to crawl away, how far he's not sure, but the Soldier tells him it's far enough. He finds a cold, dark corner in some disgusting alley and lets oblivion finally take him.

# **You are a Stranger Here, Why Did You come**

## **Chapter Notes**

AN: Okay well then. I would like to apologize for any broken feels. I can't promise it's going to get any better soon. There is a HEA though. Hold on to that.

Song for this chapter, Who are You Really by Mikky Echo

## **Chapter Two**

### **You are a Stranger Here, Why have You Come?**

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Bucky is more careful after that. He fights tooth and nail to keep control. He can't afford to lapse. He can't afford to let go.

He isn't worried not the Soldier, but rather The Asset. The Asset is like a shark. He's gotten a taste of blood, and now he's in a frenzy. He just wants more, and Bucky isn't sure how long he can control him.

So, he finds deeper hiding holes and never strays far from them. The Soldier hates this. It isn't not safe. you have to keep moving to stay one step ahead. Bucky half hopes someones does find them. Anything would be better than the constant hiding, the fighting with himself. He finds It exhausting. It wears him out, makes him tired, and weak. Then there's the nightmares. He can't get a good nights sleep. He's always on alert, always trying to keep The Asset under control. He's bone weary and fighting is hard.

The routine makes it easier. He knows where all his foxholes are and rotates through them. Never the same place in a row, but maybe once a week. He stays out of sight as much as possible. He doesn't know what will trigger the Asset, and it's easier to just stay hidden.

He has a tail. The woman is back, but she keeps a greater distance. She doesn't register as a threat to the Asset or the Soldier. Yet. She makes Bucky curious. He watched her put herself in harms way for Steve. He doesn't understand why, but this is important. They have a bond and Bucky doesn't understand the feelings he is experiencing. It both relieves and upsets him. The confusion makes him crazy.

He watches her when ever he get the chance. Bucky because he's trying to understand, the Soldier because he doesn't trust her, and The Asset because he's out for blood and waiting for the chance.

The first time he sees Steve again, Bucky doesn't quite believe it. He's not wearing the red, white, and blue suit. He looks just like anyone else walking down the street. Bucky's trying to make the tall, broad, well muscled man fit his memories. In his memories, Bucky was taller and bigger. He

remembers having to look out for Steve. What changed? What happened to cause the reverse? He knows he's still missing huge pieces of information, and and it drives him nuts trying to remember.

He follows Steve to an apartment building in Brooklyn. Something in him wants to laugh. *The boy never left Brooklyn.* He spends the rest of the night trying to unravel why that is.

Following Steve becomes a daily thing. Bucky even starts to enjoy it. It becomes the highlight of his day. He follows him all over Brooklyn, to the taco stand down the street, the movie theatre— Steve sees a movie called Frozen— and he volunteers at a rec center three blocks from his apartment every wednesday and friday. All the kids there call him Cap. Bucky fights a swell of pride and annoyance. It shouldn't matter, but for some reason, it bugs him. His name is Steve, not some half mythological hero. He's just Steve.

This goes on for weeks, but Bucky never leaves Brooklyn when Steve does. The Soldier doesn't like uptown. It's too crowded, too intimidating. Since it makes Bucky nervous, he doesn't want to risk it. The Asset would love to take advantage of Bucky if he were off his game.

The days settle into a familiar pattern, and Bucky is okay with that. Steve never seems to know that he's close, but Bucky is always tailed, so he figures that the woman must tell Steve. He's too distracted to wonder why Steve never does anything about it. He's too busy battling his own mind and trying to piece his memories together.

Bucky panics one day, because Steve never comes back from uptown. He knows the schedule by heart, he knows the route that he'll take, he knows exactly when he should see that blond head come down the street. As the sun slips down past the line of the buildings, he feels the tell-tell beginnings of a panic attack. He can't breath, he can't think, he feels like he's shaking apart into a handful of atoms. Steve is supposed to be here, now, an hour ago. Why isn't he here?

Bucky swallows thickly, forcing down the panic. He can do this. It shouldn't this hard. Maybe this time Steve went a different way. Thinking rationally is harder than he ever thought it would be, but he forces the terror away, at least for the moment. Besides, he can't slip up, the Asset is always hiding in the dark corners of his mind.

By this point Bucky, knows his way around this part of Brooklyn. He retraces his steps to Steve's apartment. He's long known which apartment was his. His tail would go to and from occasionally, and The Soldier tracked her every move. The northwest corner, five floors up. All the windows are dark, but Bucky thinks he hears something. It's not voices, its too rythmic for that, but sometimes it sounds like a call and replay.

The Soldier examines the brick building. Maybe fifty years old and sturdy. Dim lighting on this side of the building and the brick is worn in places. Scaling it would be almost easy for him.

Bucky almost doesn't do it. It's an invasion of privacy. Whatever that means. He shouldn't do it. He really shouldn't. It's the Soldier that convinces him. It is reconnaissance after all.

Climbing is easier than he remembers. In fact, it feels good to really stretch his muscles. The metal arm is useless except in situations like this. It's heavy and far too strong for anything practical, but for this, its perfect. He reaches the window, surprised when its open enough to slide his fingers underneath the crack and lift the window. It doesn't even groan or jam.

*Trap. Trap. Trap!* The warning bells go off for the Soldier and The Asset, but Bucky stamps them down as much as he can, though it gives him a headache. He's identified the sound.

It's music.

It's an annoyance to the Asset and the Soldier. To them, it's just noise. They don't hear rhythm and they don't feel the emotion inherent in every string and blast. What's just white noise to them is everything to Bucky. It brings him more to life than anything has yet. His heart begins to thump, and he's surprised that he wants to move and not in the jittery, stiff way he has for the last seventy years, but smooth and fluid. It hovers right at the edge of his memory, hazy and hidden, but so close he feels he could almost touch it.

Even though the other two are screaming in his head about traps and how this isn't safe, Bucky quietly eases himself through the window. His feet hit thick carpet and there is a moment of terror as Bucky waits for the Asset and the Soldier to be proven right. He half-hopes they do, but the lights never come up, there is no other movement, and he's still alone. He breathes out a sigh of relief. For the moment, he's still okay.

The only light in the room is coming from a bank of electronic devices on the far wall. There's a big black screen, square black boxes, more buttons and wires than he knows what to do with. The only electronics he's encountered for seventy years have been weapons. That was all he was then, just a weapon at the hands of Hydra. His heart starts racing as those memories come back. Those memories are all pain and horror, and they make the Asset happy.

Bucky inhales, trying to regain control over the panic. This isn't the place to let the Asset lose. He doesn't really understand why Steve is important and he doesn't want to take any chances while they're in his apartment.

He forces things behind closed doors in his mind. Some of the doors strain to hold everything, and he doesn't know how long they'll hold, but it's enough for now. It gives him enough leverage to keep a leash on the other two.

As soon as he trusts that's fine, he moves to the far wall. He dodges a couch, a very comfortable-looking chair, and what seems like an metric ton of pillows. After cataloging this, he ignores it. It's not important. There's something he recognizes amongst the selves of wires and cases.

It's rounded at the top and he touches the smooth wood with his fingers. He twists the knobs and is disappointed when there's no sound to come out of it.

It doesn't matter. He still recognizes it.

It's an old radio.

With the radio under his fingertips and the music swirling around him, one of the out-of-line cogs in his mind snaps into place and he's no longer in 2014.

*It's 1939, and he's not the Asset. He's not the Winter Soldier. He's just Bucky.*

*Bucky grins, hands buried deep in his pockets where he could feel the wad of bills and loose change. For months he and Steve have been saving every spare penny and dollar they could and finally they have enough. Bucky keeps a hand on it, just to make sure some ass doesn't try to pickpocket him. He's not going to let Steve down. Not now. Not ever.*

*He has to reach out and grab Steve's shoulder and pull him out of the way of a kid on a bike. "Man, you can't read the newspaper and walk at the same time."*

*Steve has the good grace to smirk sheepishly before burying his nose back in the folds of paper. "Did you hear the headlines today?"*



*Bucky shrugs. He has, but he wishes he hadn't. It is a continent away, and who cares? He has enough to worry about. Like; what is he going to do the next time Steve gets really sick? The coffee can under his mattress has some money, but its always a concern because he still has to pay the rent. "Yeah. Some of the guys at the docks were talking about it."*

*He knows what Steve is going to say before he says it. In fact since, Steve's nose is still deep in the lines of type, he mouths the words along with him.*

*"The Nazi's are going to take Poland, and no one is even going to lift finger. It's not right, Bucky."*

*Bucky rolls his eyes. They've had this conversation so many times. He should have known, with Steve's insane compulsion for justice that he would be passionate about this. If he wasn't careful, Bucky realizes, Steve would be trying to fight them himself. The Nazis were a bigger bully than Bucky could save him from.*

*"You don't think we have enough problems of our own?" Admittedly, life isn't as bad as it had been. They'd managed to pay the rent every month, and they weren't starving either. Steve had his medication, which was more important than almost anything to Bucky, although Steve had tried several times to brush it off. They weren't comfortable, but they had enough to live on. Bucky was all too aware how close to the line they were. One missed paycheck and they were screwed. It was a constant worry in his mind, and yet the rest of the damn country seemed more worried about what a country on the other side of the ocean was doing.*

*"Just because we have problems, doesn't mean we should ignore other people." Steve turned his sharp, blue eyes on Bucky. "How would you feel if you were Polish?"*

*Bucky hates that question. The truth is he would be pissed. Who wouldn't? That doesn't mean he thinks America should get involved. Sure, they fought in the Great War, but that was before the Depression. The simple truth is they can't afford it. Let Europe take care of Europe.*

*Instead of saying that, Bucky just grins. He doesn't want to think about any of this tonight. He wants to celebrate. A week is done, and that's what he gets to celebrate about these days. Sure, he's picking up a shift at the garage tomorrow, but he's done at the dock at least and he doesn't want to argue with Steve tonight.*

*"Just promise me something, bud," Bucky says with a smirk as he slings his arm around Steve's bony shoulders, and was that a rasp he just heard in his best friends breath? "Don't go picking a fight with the big German fella from downstairs. He's scary. I might not save you."*

*Steve laughs because he knows its an empty threat. Bucky would never leave him to fight his battles alone. Bucky's just glad to hear his friend laugh.*

*In an apartment in 2014, Bucky feels his lips stretch into an unfamiliar smile, because he remembers that. That was the night he and Steve spent their hard saved money to buy a radio. Steve used it to listen to news broadcasts, while Bucky liked the hit parades. Glenn Miller was his favorite, and the stereo next to radio was playing it.*

*Bucky traces the grain of the wood on the radio similar to the one he'd carried home that night. He's not quite sure what the fluttering in his chest means, but he likes it. It's not heavy and murky like everything else in his head. It makes him feel light, it eases the pressure on his chest, allows him to breath deeply for the first time since before he can remember.*

*That's who Steve was. Steve was his friend. He'd looked out for him. He'd taken care of him. Bucky, with his fractured mind and lost memories, found that odd. He'd cared for someone. He'd*

kept someone healthy, alive, and he thought maybe happy.

Happy. Was that what he'd been? Happy? Even through the near constant worry that had seemed to follow him around, had he been happy? Because of what? Because of what? Steve?

Bucky shakes his head, wishing that he had more memories. They'd help him put the pieces together, help him understand this mess. In the meantime, however, The Asset and The Soldier are starting to worry. They've been in a strange, untrustworthy environment for too long, and they've had enough. Bucky's head hurts.

He creeps from the apartment, and even he's surprised by the sense of remorse and longing when he leaves the radio behind.

# What if This Storm Ends and Leaves Us Nothing?

## Chapter Notes

Heh. Well. See. Something had to give and I'll just let you read.

Chapter Song: The Lightning Strike - Snow Patrol

## Chapter 3

### What If This Storm Ends and Leaves Us Nothing?

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Steve reappears the next morning. Bucky feels so much better once he knows he's back. He almost goes up to him. Steve was his friend right?

He doesn't trust his memories and it has been so long anyway. There's no telling what's real now. Bucky goes back to following.

Every couple of days Steve doesn't come from uptown, and Bucky sneaks into his apartment. The window is always open and there's music playing. On the third trip, he remembers its called swing and its what he and Steve listened to growing up. It makes him feel calm and feels like he can breath when its there filling his ears.

Every trip brings him a new memory, playing baseball with the neighborhood kids and punching one who purposely threw a ball at Steve's nose, asking a girl out on his first date and noticing Steve's face fall because he has no one to ask, playing monopoly for the first time and Steve beating him. Each new memory brings Bucky a little more life. He's got a fire now, and he uses it began reigning in The Asset and The Soldier. He starts to look forward to the trips more, even though he hates not knowing where Steve is during them.

It is on one of the nights when he knows where Steve is that the storm hits. He's felt it in the air all day. The air is thick and heavy like breathing soup and he can feel the power in the storm.

He has vague recollections of loving this. He can remember a woman with brown hair and the softest hazel eyes telling him that playing in the rain will make him and Steve sick. He's trying to attach a name to her, something that will tell him who she was. There's something about her that he recognizes. Something that makes him think of safety, comfort, and apple pie.

*Apple pie? What's apple pie?*

Regardless of how he enjoyed it as a child, the broken shell of a man he is now is unsettled. The Asset doesn't care. Nothing gets in the way of the mission. You just learn to work through it. The Soldier is uneasy, but it's only because he's tired. As the air around him begins to crackle and pop

with the storm building over head, Bucky starts to shake. He doesn't like this. He's open, he's exposed, and he has no where to run.

He's three blocks from Steve's apartment as the heavens open up and the rain comes down. He's drenched in a second and his muscles ache with cold. The pressure doesn't relent, either. The storm is still building and building when Bucky has a wild thought, wondering if the storm is just Hydra's way of smoking him out. It sounds impractical to his rational mind, but then again, he is their weapon. If anyone should know what Hydra is capable of its, Bucky.

The rain is coming down so hard now that the drops send little shocks of pain through his skin. He pushes himself deeper into the the corner of the alley he's taken shelter in. His teeth chatter. He pulls his knees into his chest, trying to make himself as small as possible.

He's miserable and when he's miserable he gives himself permission to brood. He's shorted the jumble of memories in his head into two distinct groups. The ones he remembers the most clearly are of Hydra. He didn't have a name then, he was just the Asset, or sometimes the Winter Soldier. Those memories are cold and full of pain. That was how Hydra broke him. He's aware of himself enough to realize that now. The Asset and the Winter Soldier aren't him. Not really. They're who he was forced to be. He is Bucky.

The second group are the memories he's been able to recover. The ones with Steve. At first he's surprised by how warm these memories make him. He's happy in them. Things weren't always great. He certainly doesn't like all of them, but he was happy. He had something then. He was Bucky.

His chest feels tight, and at first he just thinks its the rain. The wet, the suffocating pressure building on his head that brings it on. He's more aware of his own body now than when he was just the Asset. He feels it when he pulls his muscles and twists things that shouldn't be twisted. He feels what the shear weight of the metal arm does to his back and neck. His eyes get gritty when he's tired and he craves food when he gets hungry. He experiences things that he doesn't remember, and so he doesn't always always know what they are at first.

It takes him a while, but he figures this one out. This is the one that makes him want to hug the woman with hazel eyes from his memories. This is the feeling that made him throw his arm around Steve's tiny shoulders like he could soak up more of that sunlight that seemed to fall off him.

It's the same thing that has him following Steve all over Brooklyn.

It's yearning. It's the simple need of one human being to be connected to another.

That blows Bucky over more than anything else he's discovered.

He doesn't want to be alone. He's not solitary. He's not supposed to be. He, Bucky, is supposed to be with people. He's supposed to be with Steve.

With one simple realization, he can breath. He's supposed to be with Steve. He has no idea how he's supposed to do that. He barely remembers Steve. How can you be around people when the only thing you've done for seventy years is kill them? But he knows, deep in his gut, that's where he belongs. He just has to figure out how.

He began to ignore the rain when the pressure that's been building all day collapses and the roll of thunder sweeps across the city. There's a moment of horror in Bucky's mind as the sound registers, and yet doesn't.

To his tattered, destroyed mind it doesn't sound like thunder. It sounds like the boom of a cannon, like the scream of an airplane rolling overhead, like the rat-a-tat-tat of a machine gun. He can't breathe. He's a slave to the tortured images of his own mind. It's like his nightmares, only worse. The only thing he can think is the war, the bloodshed, the loss of life that came at his hands. He doesn't even understand every terrifying memory. He's young in them. He's old in them. There's war and there's just the target. He's in foxholes surrounded by brothers in arms, and there's just the Winter Soldier standing completely alone.

He's terrified, but that's not the worst of it. The thunder, the lightning lancing across the sky, is more than he prepared to deal with. The sound is more than the thunder, more than the power of gun shots, or the scream of rushing air. It's also the boom of the machine Hydra used to scramble his brain. It hurt. It echoes through his brain while he loses everything he had.

He tries to remind himself that he's not there anymore. He's Bucky, not the Asset, not the Winter Soldier. He's Bucky. They can't take that away from him.

He's Bucky. He's Bucky. He's Bucky.

# **I'd Do Anything to Make You Stay**

## Chapter Notes

AN: So, its Packeh's birthday in just a few hours! WOOT! For her birthday I'm giving her what Twifey and I agree is best chapter of this fic. So, happy birthday Packeh! I hope it's the best. Mwah!

Song for This Chapter: No Light, No Light - Florence and the Machine

## **Chapter Four**

### **I'd Do Anything to Make You Stay**

Two figures stand at the mouth of the alley. One is thin, and even at a stand still, exudes a feline grace. The other is bigger with broad shoulders hunched against the softening rain. The smaller one has a finger pressed against the bigger figures chest while he leans away toward the alley as if there's something calling him in.

"You can't go in there, Steve." The smaller one snaps, brushing rain water out of her eyes. The storm has passed, but it's still raining and having to look up at Steve has never been more of a pain. "You came up with this ridiculous plan. Now you have to live with it."

"He's not going to see me, Nat." Steve doesn't try to disguise the worry and longing in his voice. The last few months have been hell. Knowing that Bucky is close, but not being able to reach him has stretched him thin. He doesn't know what the storm has done to him, and he just needs to be sure his friend is okay.

"Are you kidding me?" Steve watches as Natasha's eyebrows arch under the shadow of her hood. "He is the only mark I've never been able to hide from. He's known everytime I've been on his tail."

Steve gives half a smirk, his real thoughts decades away to when Bucky taught him how to throw a punch and how to run when there were too many bullies. "Buck was always good at that."

"I don't think that's Bucky." Natasha tells him in a sour voice. "If you're theory is correct, then its the part of him that's still working for Hydra."

"He's not working for Hydra." Steve refuses to believe in that possibility. From the moment Bucky pulled him out of the river, Bucky had been his own man. His own broken, shattered man, but his own. Steve had seen it in his eyes when they'd fought here in the city. He is confused certainly, it had taken Steve a little while to decipher his words, but he'd figured it out. Bucky's mind has fractured. There is the part of him who is Bucky, the part of him who had stopped fighting him, and then there was the part of him that still operated under the years of brainwashing. Once Steve had understood that, he'd understood how to reach him, but it was going to take time.

He could be patient, but then the storm came. Bucky was living on the streets, and Steve didn't know how he would handle the noise. He'd had Natasha track him to the alley, which Steve knows is one of his normal hideouts, but she won't let him past. Now that he's here, he needs to see Bucky.

He needs to know that he's alright.

If only Nat would let him through.

"I know, Steve. Believe me, I get it, but we have no idea what state he's in. You can't just go waltzing in there expecting to have your friend. You said we have to wait for him to come to you."

Steve knows that. He does. That's why he's let Bucky follow him for weeks, why the window is always open several days while Steve stays at the Avenger Tower for the night. Nat and Sam say that Bucky's been there every time. He just hopes that Bucky finds whatever he needs while he's there.

"Natasha, I know." Steve sighs when the determination in her eyes doesn't dim. She's not going to let him through. He knows what he has to do, but it isn't going to be pretty. "I know this part. Bucky was scared of storms back in Germany. The sound of the thunder messed with his brain. He became hysterical. I was the only one who could calm him down. If that was then, how much worse must it be now?"

Even in the non-existent light, Steve could see Natasha's face fall. Steve alone knew how long Bucky had been broken, and it had been since the moment that Steve pulled him out of the Hydra base. Steve knows, in hindsight, that he should have sent Bucky home right then and there. He was Captain America, he could have gotten someone to agree to it, but the truth was that he'd needed Bucky. Bucky had made him feel like Steve, not this strange character he'd become. They'd done everything together before and it only made sense that they'd go to war together, but he should have sent Bucky home.

Steve isn't going to make that mistake again. Bucky is going to have to find his own way, but that doesn't mean that Steve can't help. He's going to get inside that alley if he has to take out the Black Widow to do it.

Natasha reads his face and sighs. "Okay, fine. Just be careful. If you need me, give a shout."

Steve rushes past her, into the darkness, trying to find his friend and not scare him in the process. Nat has told him that at night Bucky tries to find things to hide behind or in. It's likely security he's looking for. He just doesn't want to startle Bucky and cause him to freak out more than he likely already is.

"Bucky?" he calls softly. He feels oddly defenseless walking in the near total dark without his shield. He refuses to fight Bucky though. He refuses to even be afraid of him. No matter what, he was still his friend, his Bucky. "Bucky, it's just me. It's Steve. I just wanted to make sure you were okay. That was some storm."

There's a soft sound somewhere in front of him, shuffling Steve thinks. Although it could be sniffing, too. Steve's heard enough of that in his lifetime. Whenever he got sick, Bucky would be a wreck. Especially after Steve's mother died. He'd had to point out to Bucky he was not a mother hen. Steve smiled as the warm memories washed over him. He thought about the war too much, and all the things that he should have done differently. It's nice to remember when he was happy with Bucky.

He knows that he told Natasha he wouldn't let Bucky see him, but he can't help it. Steve needs to be sure Bucky is okay and there is nothing that will reassure him like seeing him. She's right anyway, Bucky seems to know everything, and he probably already knows that Steve's in the alley. It shouldn't hurt.

"Bucky? I'm going to come a little closer." Steve takes the steps slow, so as not to startle him.

Because of the lack of light Steve is almost on top of him before he notices.

Bucky is huddled, back against the cold stone wall, with his arms around his legs and his forehead down. He's incredibly small like this and soaking wet. Steve's alarmed when he realizes that Bucky is swaying like he's about to topple over. He nearly reaches out to grab his shoulder before he realizes what a mistake that could be. He's been warned not to try to touch Bucky until he's ready. Steve crouches just a few feet from him, taking everything in him to not grab his friend in what would likely be his first hug since 1944.

"Bucky?" Steve's voice is rough and he's surprised when he has to fight the urge to cry. "Buck? You okay?"

Slowly he lifts his head. His hair has grown back out, the ends brushing the top of his cheekbones. He blinks slowly, and the blue eyes Steve knows so well are glassy and unfocused. It's more Bucky than the Winter Soldiers' heartless stare, but he's not there yet.

"Steve?" Bucky's hoarse croak, the wavering in it, shocks Steve. It's the first time he's heard his name come from those lips since a train way up in the Alps. He doesn't care if he's barely Bucky, it still sounds like music to Steve.

"Yeah. Yeah, it's me."

"Steve." Bucky sighs, eyes fluttering closed for a moment. Steve misses that clear blue instantly, but the pain etched into the man's face distracts him. "Steve, what's my name? I can't remember. I tried. I tried so hard, but the noises broke everything. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Bucky's face crumples, his shoulders shaking, and Steve suspected it wasn't from cold. He wanted to grab Bucky and never let him go, but he couldn't do that because it would probably just terrorize what was left of him. So, he put on a fake smile, just like the one Bucky used to give him that he thought he couldn't see through. "Don't. Don't be sorry. It's going to be okay. Alright? You're name is James Buchanan Barnes. Everyone called you Bucky though."

Bucky looks back at him with wide, scared eyes. The blue is tarnished by fear and a haunted expression. Steve finds a shred of Bucky's old determination in them as well. That drive that always pushed Bucky forward, whether he was pulling Steve out of fights, or following Steve into hell, was still there. That gave Steve more hope than anything. Bucky was in there somewhere and he was fighting. Steve could work with that.

"Bucky." The man mutters to himself. He takes a deep breath and seems to unfold a little. The glassy glaze on his eyes eases away and, for a moment at least, Steve finds his friend. "That was it. I'm Bucky. You're Steve."

Steve nods, and he thinks a tear might have escaped his eyes. "Yeah, that's it. How ya doin' Buck?"

"Not so great." There was just a hint of shaking in his voice, and it makes Steve long to grab Bucky and not let go. "It's hard holding on."

"What are you holding on to? You're Bucky."

"They don't like that." Bucky's voice darkens as his eyes seem to go out of focus again. "It's easier for them if I don't have a name."

"Easier for who, Buck?"

"The Asset. The Soldier to, but I'm not worried about him." Bucky's voice dropped to a whisper,



and Steve had to lean in to hear him. "He's angry, and sometimes I can't control him."

In an instant, Steve felt his heart shatter. He hated that he was right. Bucky's mind had broken down fault lines. Not only did he not remember much of who he really was, the years of torture and brainwashing had divided his mind. Steve was at a loss for words. He wanted to make it better, but he was afraid to make worse. What did he tell Bucky that would keep him going?

"Bucky, look at me?" He's not sure why he asked. Maybe he just wants to see Bucky's blue eyes again. He does look, skittishly, as if he's afraid that Steve is going to hit him. Steve wants to throw up. "Hey, its going to be okay. I'm gonna help you through this. You're not alone any more."

He watches as Bucky pulls in a shaky breath. Those blue eyes Steve can't get enough of have a wet sheen to them. A whimper escapes his lips, and for just a moment he thinks that Bucky is going to reach out for him. He doesn't know if he's saddened or relieved when he doesn't.

"I'm never alone." Bucky nearly sobs. "I'm never ever alone and the company is awful."

Steve can't take it anymore. He reaches out and grabs Bucky's shoulder, the real one. The jacket he has on is wet and cold, but he can feel the hard muscle underneath. He can also feel Bucky shaking. That is until Bucky freezes in shock. His eyes dilate in fear, becoming black pools. He hasn't been touched, not like this, in seventy years.

"Bucky, you're safe and you're going to be okay. I promise. Okay? I'm going to take care of you. Nothing is going to hurt you and you aren't going to hurt anyone else. Understand?"

Bucky sighs deeply, relaxing under Steve's hand. There are three tears slowly marking his cheeks, but his eyes are crystal blue again and burning. Burning with determination and a small amount of hope. Steve smiles because he knows for the first time, without a doubt, that Bucky is going to be okay.

Bucky always was a fighter. He's going to be okay.

Steve stayed with Bucky for another hour as his friends eyes drifted closed, exhaustion claiming his worn out body. They sit still in silence until Bucky is almost asleep before the words bubble up from Steve's throat before he can stop them.

"You can come home whenever you're ready, Bucky."

His eyes flutter open and a dreamy smile graces his face. One dimple curves a little deeper into his cheek, just the shadow of the grin that he used to give away feel. "Thanks, Steve."

"Always, Buck."

Bucky fades off to the sleep, and Steve watches for a handful of precious minutes. He knows that he's going to have to leave him, that Natasha was probably a nervous wreck. He was going to have to wait for Bucky to come him. He knew where home was at least. Steve could hold on to that.

With a sigh, he pushes away from the stone wall, moving slowly and silently so that Bucky wouldn't wake up. Steve shakes off his leather jacket and drapes it over Bucky's shoulders. He couldn't stand the idea of his friend being alone in the cold anymore.

Bucky would be home soon.

# **They Just Disappeared to the Back of My Mind**

## Chapter Notes

Not much to say here. Just thanks for reading!

Song for this Chapter: Little Black Submarines - Black Keys

## **Chapter 5**

### **They Just Disappeared to the Back of My Mind**

He's climbed this wall so many times now that Bucky thinks he could do it blindfolded.

Bucky's been on edge for days. Since the storm, really. He can't pinpoint exactly what it is. He remembers the lightening that reminded him of the machine that wiped his mind. He remembers forgetting his real name until Steve told him what it was. He's still not certain whether Steve was really there, or if he was just dreaming.

He does remember Steve telling him that he could come home whenever he is ready.

He just wishes he knew when that was.

Bucky wants nothing more than to go home. The good memories he has, the ones where he was happy and safe, all tell him where he belongs and its with Steve.

Or it's where he used to belong.

Memories of being Bucky aren't the only ones he's gotten back. He's also remembered the things he's done as the Winter Soldier. He wasn't a man then, he was a Hydra weapon. He killed who he was told to kill, and there was no mercy. The Asset still doesn't understand to concept of mercy, the Soldier is conflicted, and Bucky's heartbroken. Sure, he fought in a war, and he killed people during it, but that was war. He did that to protect people. That was to keep his home, his family, his friends safe. That wasn't the unjustified killing he'd done for Hydra.

Bucky has blood on his hands, so much that he isn't sure if he'll ever really be clean.

Mindless monsters didn't deserve a home.

So, the question was, how much of a monster was he? Was he Bucky Barnes, formerly a sergeant, Steve Rogers best friend. Or was he the Winter Soldier, Hydra's asset and nothing more than a weapon to be pointed and used? Was he a human being with feelings, thoughts, and emotions? Was he capable of everything humanity could do, or was he the mindless machine he'd been conditioned to become?

He doesn't know. He just doesn't know. There's a war going on in his head, and there's a lot of

blood on his hands. The world would have liked his head on a pike, and there was a man who would still call him friend.

This choice would have to be Bucky's.

Maybe its this knowledge that finds him climbing back through Steve's window. It's the first time since the storm that Steve hasn't come back from uptown. Bucky doesn't keep good count, but he thinks its been about a week and a half. He almost didn't come. He doesn't like that he's so broken and everything he remembers of Steve is sunshine and life. Sometimes the sun hurts, and sometimes you just don't want to mar the beauty of it.

Like a moth to the deadly flame Bucky still slides through the window, plants his feet on the carpet, and finds himself once again in the land of the sun. There's music, just as always. He recognizes it this time. Glenn Miller. The Howling Commandos used to enjoy him. They'd even had an all night wake after his plane disappeared. Steve and Bucky had borne it with good grace and even shed a few tears into their beers.

Bucky feels his lips stretch into an odd smile. He doesn't usually remember the war in good terms. This memory isn't even good, but its not drenched in horror and blood so, he'll take it.

Bucky walks slowly around the room, cataloguing everything he finds. There's always something different in the room, something that will catch his attention. He notes that it's a record rather than the old radio playing this time. That's not worth spending much time on. He and Steve had barely been able to afford the radio, much less records.

He focuses on the coffee table. There's dozens of sketch books of varying sizes and ages. Some look so worn, Bucky's almost afraid to touch them and cause them to fall apart under his fingers.

He picks up the one that looks the oldest. It's soft brown leather and the pages are wrinkled and twisted like they've been wet. He opens it to the middle and finds faded, sometimes smeared pencil sketches. There's maps, a dancing monkey, a portrait of a beautiful woman. It takes a moment, but he finds a name and a feeling. Peggy, and irrational jealousy.

He shuffles that thought process, away and it feels like an old habit. You ignore whatever it is that brings out that jealousy. Bury it down deep where it can't hurt you, and it can't hurt Steve. Bucky turns the page with the same idea. He has enough on his plate already.

He flips to the front and finds his own face. Or it was his own face a very long time ago. That face isn't lined with care, isn't haunted by war. It's smile is real and a little bit smug, it's eyes sparkle with a hint of mischievousness. It's younger, lighter, and everything Bucky wants to be again.

Of all the memories he's gained its, those from when he was kid when he was just a little jerk that he values the most. It's those he wants back. He wants those smiles, those laughs, those flirtations. He wants him and Steve against the word, and when did that change anyway? Who decided that they needed to fight a war? They were just two kids from Brooklyn, two little punks barely scraping up enough to live on and being okay with that.

Who really turned Bucky into a weapon, and in whose hands was he first used?

*The memory comes completely unbidden.*

*Bucky's head is in his hands, his eyes squinted shut, trying to think of anything he could possibly do to get out of this. Unfortunately, there's nothing. Absolutely nothing.*

*His eyes open and glare at the paper in front of him as if he can burn it with just the force of his*

*gaze. If he could just make it disappear, his problems would be solved.*

*But that's not the way the world works, is it?*

*Bucky can't pull in a deep enough breath as panic and fear settle into his system. His body wants more oxygen, but his lungs refuse to supply it. He wonders if this is how Steve feels when he has an asthma attack.*

*Oh god, Steve. Steve who he's spent a lifetime pulling out of trouble. Steve who's been to every recruiting station in Brooklyn, hell in the whole damn city. Steve who would do anything to fight the big bad bully. Bucky is so thankful he's been turned down. Steve would just get himself killed and the world needs Steve in it. The world didn't need Bucky.*

*Bucky's blood pressure skyrockets. Steve can't be left alone. He gets in so much trouble even with Bucky here to save his ass. He doesn't know how to run. He gets these stupid ideas into his head and doesn't think them through.*

*Steve. Steve. Steve. It repeats in his head like a mantra. Something he just can't shake. This is the ultimate betrayal. Steve won't forgive him for this. Bucky's being called to war when Steve wants to go bad. There is nothing he could do. Not that he's certain he would if he could. Its hard living up to Steve, brave, fearless, righteous Steve. Bucky knows he can't live up to that, but he'll be damned if he won't try.*

*Bucky's so caught up his thoughts that he doesn't even hear the door open. He doesn't know he's not alone until small, bony fingers are gripping his shoulder and shaking.*

*"Buck? Bucky, what's wrong?"*

*Bucky looked over to find Steve's blue eyes wide with concern. He realizes that their roles are reversed. That it is usually Bucky sitting on this couch with worry and fear, while Steve is sick. Bucky's not sick, but his mind and heart are in the process of shattering and he can't hide it.*

*For a moment, as he stares at Steve, he considers lying. He'll have to tell him at some point sure, but it can wait. It can just wait. He can have a moment. He deserves one more day. After everything he's done, after all the times he's saved Steve, all the times he's been good, he deserves one more night where everything is their version of normal, where he doesn't have to break his best friends heart.*

*He tries, oh how he tries, but his own emotions are too raw, too close to the surface. His smile that's really a mask, the one he's been wearing for years, just doesn't seem to work. As much as he wants to lie, he can't.*

*Bucky sighs and turns away. He can't bare to see Steve's face fall, and the anger that he knows will grow there. "I got drafted, Steve."*

*Bucky swallows the lump building in his throat. He's waiting for Steve to get mad. He's waiting for what's left of his life to fall apart. After Steve leaves him, war won't be so bad.*

*"When do you leave?" Steve's voice is soft and unhurried. Bucky can't read between his lines.*

*"I don't know. I have to report to a recruiting station tomorrow."*

*The air is sickeningly thick between them. Neither of them say a word, and Bucky wishes Steve would start already. He could rant and rave all he wanted. Bucky would take it if he just didn't leave him. Bucky would take it all as long as Steve would still be here if he got back.*

*Bucky would never be able to adequately describe the shock that ran through his mind when Steve, rather than cursing him with every bad name he knew, grabbed his shoulders and hugged him.*

*Bucky tried to hold it together. He bit his bottom lip and blinked rapidly to keep from crying. He was supposed to be the strong one. He should have been able to hold this together. He wasn't a coward. He could do this. He could.*

*Until he can't anymore. Everything crashes in on him, wave after wave. The fear of being shipped off to war, the fear of leaving Steve to fend for himself. The terrifying feeling that if he left for Europe, he was never coming back.*

*He sobbed, curling into Steve's thin shoulder and completely uncaring that this wasn't right. Steve was warm and present, he cared, he was the damn sun, and he wasn't pushing Bucky away. Outside their apartment door, Bucky would be the perfect image of the bright young soldier, but here he was going to rant and rave because all he really wanted was to never leave this apartment.*

*He'd never wanted this. Other men would throw themselves at war and be better suited for it. Even Steve was better and was trying with all his might, and here Bucky was crying because he didn't want to go. He didn't want to go. He wasn't a soldier. He was just a boy from Brooklyn, struggling just to get by and not really caring, because he had Steve and that was all that mattered.*

*"I'm sorry." For what Bucky's not sure. Everything he guesses.*

*And Steve, perfect, compassionate, remarkable Steve, doesn't see it for the betrayal Bucky knows it is. Steve just squeezes him a little tighter and tells him over and over that it's going to be okay.*

Living up to Steve is hard. It was hard then, and it's even harder now. How do you live up to the perfect, fearless boy? Brave beyond any rationality, kind, warm as a summer breeze. From the moment Bucky had met Steve as a kid, he'd tried to live up to him.

He failed most of the time. He could never be as brave or as fearless. Bucky would have run when there was too many bullies, if Steve would have let him. Bucky wasn't mean, but he could never bring himself to really care about the strangers around him. Bucky would use his charming smile to get what he wanted. Steve never gave up. Bucky did.

Bucky gave up. A chill sweeps through his body and he knows the absolute truth. He gave up. He let Hydra turn him into this wreck. He let them mold him and shape him into a killer, into a destructive force. He wasn't strong enough to defeat them, not smart enough to outwit them. He gave up.

The Asset cackles somewhere in the depths of his mind as Bucky learns the truth. He was always going to turn out like this. Bucky wasn't good enough to stand in Steve's shadow. Like Icarus reaching for the sun, he was destined to fall and he fell hard. He became something he never wanted to be, and now he's stained by it. He'll never be able to escape it. He'll never be able to destroy it.

The Winter Soldier killed Bucky Barnes a long time ago.

So then, what's the point in still fighting it?

# **You Know You Gotta Help Me Out**

## Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I hope you're having a wonderful Holiday season. I can't believe this is the next to last chapter. I know. I know. Crazy.

The song for this chapter is one of my absolute favorites. All These Things I've Done - The Killers. I highly recommend giving it a listen!

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## **Chapter 6**

### **You Know You Gotta Help Me Out**

Steve is tired as he trudges up the steps to his apartment. He and Tony stayed up far too late last night while Tony showed him how to play video games. He'd enjoyed the games, and, though Tony had a tendency to be an ass, he was just trying to cheer Steve up. Not being able to reach Bucky had worn him down to the point that he's not sure which direction will put his head over water.

Steve isn't quite sure why he put off leaving Brooklyn for so long. He tried telling himself that after the storm, Bucky needed time to re-adjust. He didn't want to overwhelm him.

Maybe, that's not the whole truth.

The truth is, Steve didn't want to leave. He's not really sure he wants to leave his bed. Seeing Bucky like that, broken, scared, and alone, had affected him more than he thought it would. He wanted Bucky home, with him, where he's safe. He's beginning to lose hope that Bucky will ever come home of his own choosing.

Maybe his plan had been wrong. Maybe Bucky didn't even know how to make the decision to come home. As much as he wants to believe otherwise, Steve may never get his best friend back, and that hurts more than anything.

The only thing on Steve's mind as he pushes open his door is crawling into bed and not coming out of it for a week. That plan is erased in a second.

His living room is trashed. Furniture tipped over, the floor covered in stuffing from torn pillows and cushions, bits of broken glass, and metal that's been twisted beyond recognition. His entertainment center has been tipped over, the tv and bits of stereo equipment pulverised nearly into dust.

The single calm point in the storm was the coffee table where he'd put his sketchbooks. He steps

around the litter to approach the table where he finds that only one book has been touched. It's open to a sketch he'd done of Bucky not long after they'd found out he'd been drafted. Steve hadn't realized it could trigger something so destructive.

He pulls out his phone as his heart begins pounding. She picked up on the first ring. "Nat, where's Bucky?"

"I don't know." She sounds more tired than Steve has ever heard her. "I lost him last night after he left your place. Sam and I have been looking ever since."

Steve fights the urge to throw his phone. He knows it's not Natasha's fault that Bucky has slipped tails before, but it does nothing to calm his nerves. Something happened here last night, and now Bucky's in the wind.

"Did you see him leave?"

"Yes, and he was alone."

That's one worry off his list. He wasn't captured by anyone, so he must still be on the streets. That's the better option. Steve grabs his shield and hurries back outside. "Tell me where you and Sam have looked."

By noon they've crisscrossed most of Brooklyn. Steve has been in more alleys and underpasses than he cares to count, finding nothing. Not a hint of Bucky. Nothing. Steve knows that if Bucky wants to stay hidden, then he will. He has a fine window to find Bucky and he can feel time ticking away on him. He has to hope that Bucky hasn't left Brooklyn otherwise, he may be gone good.

"We'll find him, Steve." Sam's voice drifts through his earpiece. "We did it once, we'll do it again."

"Part of him wanted to be found then." Steve muttered, hating that the truth burns his mouth, like swallowing acid. "If we don't find him now we'll lose him for good."

Sam doesn't try to argue, and Natasha already knows how difficult it is to find the Winter Soldier. Steve does his best to hide how badly he's shaking. He's overwhelmed with nervous energy and he wants to run. He reminds himself to breathe, and to walk instead of running. Natasha does the same thing in his ear.

Sam, overhead, gives directions to them and they do their best to follow. Hours tick by and Steve is beginning to lose it. Either Bucky has completely left Brooklyn, or he's buried so deep that he'll never be found.

Steve isn't far from the docks when he yanks the microphone from his ear and stuffs it into his pocket. The sun is sinking on the horizon, and he needs a moment. He slumps against an old stone wall and tries not to think. If he could clear his head of the worry and panic for just a moment, then he can think of something to try.

Sarah Rodgers used to tell him that the greatest things in his life would happen when he least expected it. He hasn't blocked out the world for longer than a minute before the one voice he wants to hear more than anything interrupts.

"Steve?"

His eyes fly open, and he finds Bucky leaning around the corner, eyes more haunted than he can ever remember seeing them. The metal arm is limp at his side while the other is braced against the wall, taking most of the support. He doesn't notice until a full minute later that the silver fingers are

still wrapped around the trigger of an Glock handgun. It's not hard to put everything together. "You've been following me?"

Bucky nods, slumping against the wall as if he doesn't even have the strength to stand up. "Ever since you got to your apartment."

"Have many times have I been in your sights?" Steve isn't sure what upsets him more, that Bucky has been hunting him, or that Bucky was so close and Steve still couldn't see him.

"I didn't count." Bucky doesn't look at him, just somewhere over his shoulder. It doesn't take a mind reader to see the shame written across his face. "A lot."

"Why? Was it one of the others?"

"Yes." Bucky's face brightens for a moment before crumbling again. Steve is a little relieved that he can still tell when Bucky is lying. "No. Not entirely. I just got so angry."

"What happened?" Steve takes a step toward, and the gun comes up. He drops the shield with a thud at his feet and hold his hands up. "I'm not going to hurt you, Bucky."

Bucky presses his lips into a thin line, confused and perhaps a little hurt. Steve doesn't know what happened last night, but suspects that it was his fault.

"Bucky, talk to me? Please?" Steve begs as a tear rolls down Bucky's face. He looks so conflicted, so lost, and it breaks Steve's heart because Bucky was never lost. He was one of those people who made himself at home wherever he went.

More than anything in the world, Steve wants his friend back. He wants a second chance at what they had, to maybe do it right, or do it better this time. He doesn't care. He just wants it and if he can't have it, then he'll take a bullet from Bucky if it'll help him.

"I couldn't." Bucky's voice shakes as he struggles to talk. Steve waits, afraid to move a muscle for fear of Bucky shutting down even farther. "I couldn't be you. I can remember. I tried so hard to be brave, and fearless, and not let them change me, but I was weak, and the pain was too much. I let them just delete me."

Steve's stomach drops to the bottom of his shoes. "Bucky, I read your file. You fought them tooth and nail. They were going to give up until they figured out how to put you on ice. What you did isn't your fault."

"Yes, it is!" He screams, and then chokes on a sob. "It is. It is. It is. It's my fault. It's all my fault. I'm...I'm dirty. I killed. I killed so many, and I hurt many more. I didn't try to stop. I didn't fight them. I just did it."

Steve watches the resolve crumble. The gun slowly lowers, and Steve takes another step, and another, and another, until he's right in front of Bucky. He knows the risk he takes as he reaches up to place his palms on either side of Bucky's face. He wants Bucky to look at him, to see the truth in his face when he says, "I forgive you."

The gun falls with a clatter, and Bucky surges forward unable to hold himself up any longer. He sinks into Steve, who holds him as he sobs. Steve wraps both arms around him, refusing to let him go, wanting him to know that he's accepted, that Steve doesn't care what he had done. He's still Bucky, and that was all that mattered.

He knows one thing for sure. He's not letting Bucky go now.





# **You're the Reason That I Feel So Strong**

## Chapter Notes

OMG. I can't believe this is all over! The last chapter. Eep! I don't know what to say. Just thank you everyone for read and reviewing and failing on twitter. I don't know what I would do without you guys. Very specail thanks to MyHerion, my beta extraordinar. I love you chicky! And, of course, Angelycdevil for hooking me on Stucky in the first place and always acting as my sounding board even when I'm freaking out a little. I love Twifey!

I do have a sequel planned. I just couldn't let MPD!Bucky go but there'll probably be a couple other fics in between.

Oh, and HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Song for this chapter Mess is Mine - Vance Joy

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## **Chapter 7**

### **You're the Reason I Feel so Strong**

The first trip to the therapist was the worst. It's an environment that Bucky doesn't know, that he doesn't understand, and a person he has never met before and isn't sure he can trust. Steve doesn't say a word when Bucky grips his hand like a child through the whole appointment.

When Bucky wakes up in the middle of the night screaming from a nightmare, Steve is always there to remind him of who he is. Steve sleeps in the chair next to his bed and never complains.

On the rare times when Bucky just can't control the Asset any longer Steve, is there to hold him down and keep him from hurting anyone else. When Bucky comes back to himself, Steve is there to force the shame away.

It's the same no matter what Bucky's up against, Steve is always there. He's never alone. He never has to go to battle by himself.

Steve makes a big deal out of every victory. Bucky loves getting new memories because of the way Steve's face lights up when he does.

When the days are bad and Bucky's sullen and grouchy, when he's in so much pain that he can hardly think straight, Steve is there. He's a ray of sunshine. Bucky soaks him up and it'll all he can do. He lives in Steve's shadow and it's the best medicine he has.

Three months later and Bucky is better. He's not healed, nor is he whole, he still has nightmares every night, storms still statter his fragile walls, but he's better. He thinks that maybe he's going to

be okay.

He's trying to figure out why that is. Steve's out getting something for dinner, and it's one of those rare times when he's alone. The Asset is quiet, the Soldier hasn't been an issue in a while, and Bucky can breathe. He's not quite sure what to call this feeling. It's not something he's known in a really long time. He tries to think back for something to equate it to. He has to go past Hydra for sure, past the war, past when he got drafted. He remembers a moment laying in the floor of their dingy apartment, while Steve claims the couch. They were listening to some show on the radio and they can't stop laughing.

Bucky knows. He's content. There are so many things that could go wrong, so many things are worrying him, but, it doesn't matter. He's content. He's got Steve, and he's okay.

Was that all it really took?

It just took Steve?

That doesn't hardly seem fair. Bucky is a wreck. Steve makes him better, but what makes Steve better? He is doing everything for Bucky and Bucky is incredibly thankful, but he is beginning to wonder if that's right. Maybe Steve is doing too much for him.

Bucky's lungs freeze up. Terror seeps through his system. Panic buzzes along his skin. It had been a half-thought, not even something to take seriously, but it destroys the fragile peace of the moment.

He can't do this without Steve. He just can't.

He vaguely remembers a therapist or a doctor telling him to put his head between his knees when he gets like this and just breathe. It's hard, the terror has him seized up, and just moving takes effort, but he does it.

He does it because of Steve. Because for once, he wants to be as strong as Steve. Maybe he wants to be worthy of him. Maybe just once he doesn't want to be the dark to the light.

"Bucky?" He doesn't hear the door open. He only hears Steve's voice. "Hey, Bucky, what's wrong? What happened?"

Bucky raises his head to find Steve, kneeling in front of him. Bucky wants to cry, but he doesn't. He's tired of being weak and having to suffer through panic attacks and nightmares. Steve's eyes are wide, worried, and Bucky wants to kick himself. He can't even hold himself together for twenty minutes.

"Why did you bother?" Bucky doesn't mean to ask. He really doesn't want to bother Steve, but the words bubble up his throat and he can't stop.

Steve stares flabbergasted at Bucky. "Why did I do what?"

"Why did you save me? I'm a mess, Steve. I'm not good. I'm not really sure if there is anything here worth saving."

"There's everything worth saving." Steve uses that same quiet confidence that Bucky is starting to remember from his life before Hydra. It makes it hard not to take what he says seriously. "You didn't do any of those things. The Asset, that thing that Hydra made you into, he did those things. Bucky Barnes is worth saving."

Bucky swallows thickly. The absolute certainty in Steve's voice causes a warm glow to settle over him. Bucky fights the urge to smile. He loves Steve's confidence, but he needs to be certain. "Steve, what if I never get better? What if I'm never able to kick the other two?"

"What if I stay a perfect wreck?"

Steve shrugs with a smug look. Bucky can't decide if he wants to hit him or kiss him. Wait, kiss him?

"Till the end of the line, Bucky. That makes your mess, my mess."

Steve's smile is like the sun and Bucky wants to melt into it. He's not even really sure what compels him, but he leans forward and kisses him. For one beautiful moment it doesn't matter what Bucky has done in the past, or what he's going to do in the future. It doesn't matter that Bucky is still broken. He loves Steve and by some miracle, Steve still finds something in him worth loving.

Steve freezes for just a moment at Bucky's sudden movement. Bucky knows that should bother him, but it doesn't. He can't get over the fact that he's kissing Steve. He knows that he shouldn't do this, that it's probably wrong, but for that moment he just doesn't care. He's more alive than he's felt since he can't remember and that makes everything worth it.

And then the greatest miracle of Bucky's life takes place. Steve reaches forward, grabs Bucky's shirt, and pulls him down farther. Steve throws himself into their kiss, his lips hard against Bucky's as his other hand creeps up Bucky's neck.

He's fingers are gentle like his touching porcelain and is afraid it's going to shatter. The caring, the tenderness inherent in the touch shocks Bucky to his core. Steve cares about him. No, that's not what the fingers now softly stroking his cheek tell him.

Steve loves him.

Bucky moans in pleasure, now trying to push himself further into Steve. A wet tongue brushes Bucky's lips and then invades his mouth when he gasps. Steve is heavy and demanding and Bucky loves it.

For the first time in so long, Bucky isn't alone. He clings to Steve and his warmth and finds the last piece of his puzzle. The part of him, the best part of him, that loved Steve. Even if he'd never acted on it, even if it was wrong, he loves Steve.

By the time they're forced apart, simply because even super soldiers have to breathe, they were so entwined that Bucky isn't quite sure how to untangle their bodies. Not that it mattered. Steve's lips and cheeks are cherry red, his blue eyes were almost completely black. He's gorgeous. Bucky can't quite believe this is real.

Steve smirks, and Bucky can't breathe again. "I gotta be honest. I've wanted to kiss you ever since we were teenagers."

Bucky laughs. Not just the occasional snicker that he's managed until now, but deep belly laughs. He falls on to the floor, clutching his stomach until there are tears in his eyes.

He's vaguely aware that Steve has collapsed next to him, close enough that Bucky can feel the warmth seeping off him.

He knows he still has a long way to go and many hurdles to cross.

He knows that he will have to deal with the trauma inflicted on him by Hydra and the splintering of his mind for the rest of his life.

It just doesn't matter.

He has Steve.

He's home.

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